

The overcomer

Part 1

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Duration	00:48:50
Online version	https://www.audioteaching.org/en/sermons/np006/the-overcomer

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[00:00:01] Readings this afternoon, the first in the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 11. Reading from verse 20. Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not. Woe unto thee, Chorazin! Woe unto thee, Bethsaida!

For if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment than for you.

And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell. [00:01:04] For if the mighty works which have been done in thee had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for thee. At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent and has revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight. All things are delivered unto me of my Father. And no man knoweth the Son but the Father, neither knoweth any man the Father save the Son. [00:02:04] And he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him. Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

And then secondly, in the book of Revelation, chapter 3, reading from verse 7, And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write, These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, [00:03:01] he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth, and shutteth, and no man openeth, I know thy works.

Behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it, for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name.

Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews and are not, but do lie. Behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee, because thou hast kept the word of my patience. I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, [00:04:05] which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth. Behold, I come quickly.

Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.

Him that overcometh, will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out. And I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is New Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God. And I will write upon him my new name.

He that hath an ear to hear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches. [00:05:12] ...you to turn to one of the Old Testament minor prophets, keeping your finger perhaps in Revelation 3.

Nahum, if you please. Next door but one to Jonah, which is not too far beyond Daniel. Well, we can relax because I'm not going to attempt to read the book of Nahum.

But the other day, [00:06:01] when I was thinking about and reading about one of the wonderful things that happened in the life of the Lord Jesus at Capernaum, it came to my mind, to my notice again, that the very word Capernaum means, as you will know, village of Nahum.

And this was remarkable for me. This is how I think the Lord sometimes speaks to people like me, by association of ideas. I'm not for one moment suggesting that the Nahum of Capernaum was the same man as we have here in the Old Testament. But it happened that I had been attracted to the message of Nahum, the prophet, a few days before.

[00:07:03] And I want just for a moment to comment on these two widely different cities that have so much in common.

I mean now the city of Nineveh. Nahum writes in vitriolic language, prophetically, about the cutting down and cutting off of one of the greatest cities the world has ever seen, Nineveh.

And this following very closely in the Old Testament upon the book of Jonah, which is also, of course, as you know, concerned with Nineveh. [00:08:01] I think, and I haven't checked this, but I think it's the only city I know of that has had two whole books of the Bible written about it, indeed written to it. That's rather remarkable. And then I noticed that these two widely different cities, Nineveh very large, Capernaum relatively small, geographically separated by a great distance, has several things in common which is a pointer to what I have to say in these few moments. Nineveh was written, was founded by, very early in history, we read in chapter 10 of Genesis, [00:09:01] that it was founded by Nimrod, a mighty hunter before the Lord. But if he'd left his activities at hunting it would seem nothing more would have been read of him so much anyhow. But here we find that his name means rebel or maybe upstart.

And Nimrod was responsible, I believe, for founding this great Assyrian empire which was a great scourge of the people of God, as you know from the Old Testament. He also, I believe, laid the foundation of Babylon. He must have been, I think, the very originator of power politics, Nimrod.

Very go-ahead, very strident, [00:10:05] very able to get his own way, the sort of man who founded not only cities but empires. But Nineveh quite quickly went bad.

And the badness was so distinct that God noted it specially in his own word.

It is known, it was known, was Nineveh, as the robber city.

Apparently it had the reputation of taking other people's goods and position for itself.

And by hook or by crook, setting up a mighty stature for itself.

Yes. [00:11:03] It's not a pretty picture, but it's a true one. Nimrod is one of those men that, as you read the Scripture, Genesis, and so on, is noted for this, that he endeavored to make the world a livable and pleasant place without God. Without God. And that's the kind of world we live in today. A world which is, in many parts, in what we call the civilized parts, very livable, and comfortable for many, away from God. Very clever. Very successful. But not unnoticed by God. And, [00:12:03] it is amazing to me that in the first great action that the Lord takes in respect of Nineveh, he holds out the hand of salvation. And we read that Nineveh repented in sackcloth and ashes. Sackcloth and ashes under the reluctant ministry of Jonah.

We're not here to speak about Jonah, but to the ordinary reader, Jonah is an enigma. A curious man who was nevertheless sent by God. But we are here for a moment to consider that under his preaching, [00:13:02] and it seems almost to his disappointment and amaze, the great evil Nineveh, who was threatened with destruction in 40 days, repented.

And repented so really that God forgave them. And they knew what it was to feel the saving hand of God upon them in exchange for their sins. But about 75 or 100 years later, Nahum wrote on this time, this terrible short book of prophecy against this city. We read in chapter 2, verse 6, of utter destruction by water. The rivers, the gates of the rivers shall be opened [00:14:03] and the palace shall be dissolved. It was destroyed by flood and water.

Profane history confirms this and archeological research has confirmed it too. Not that we need the confirmation. We have the word of God. Let us be sure about that. But it was destroyed. It was destroyed. At least he prophesied its destruction. I know people say, oh well, it's all very well. We can't prove that these men actually prophesied. Probably they reported after the event. This is not true. God does not waste time in his word. Let us all remember, and those of us who are perhaps enjoying having been brought to the Lord Jesus as our savior, reading the Bible through for the first time, [00:15:01] and noting its marvelous language and its wonders, let us start off by learning that God wastes no time, no energy, on foolish stories, or on important detail. The prophet Nahum spoke at least 75 years and maybe more before the actual fall of Nineveh. Oh well, let's see. Chapter 213 of Nahum.

Behold, I am against thee, saith the Lord of hosts, and I will burn her chariots in the smoke, and the sword shall devour thy young lions.

And I will cut off thy prey from the earth, and the voice of thy messages shall be no more heard. [00:16:02] And this prophecy went on to declare that Nineveh should be ruined and ruined forever. The last verse of the book. 319. There is no healing of thy bruise.

Thy wound is grievous. All that hear the bruit of thee shall clap their hands over thee, for upon whom hath not thy wickedness passed continually.

Continually. I just want to make the point that this city of Sennacherib, this city noted for being the base of the operations [00:17:02] against the people of God for so many years, in marvelous mercy and grace, was chosen for salvation and turned as a city, not just as individuals, as a city repented in

sackcloth and ashes. And yet, failure set in, decadence, and in a few short years, they were back and worse than before, until they were in fact wiped out.

Now Capernaum had a greater blessing than Nineveh. Capernaum had the marvelous experience of having the Lord of glory [00:18:06] not only walking its streets, but making His home there. Because in the ninth chapter of Matthew, it is recorded of Capernaum that it was His own city.

After Nazareth had thrown this blessed person the very Son of God, the one come down from highest glory, the Son of God come down to be the humble Son of Man. After Nazareth had discarded Him, rejected Him, He went to Capernaum. And there's more about Capernaum in the Gospels since I've had another look at it than I'd suspected there was. [00:19:01] In Capernaum, some of the greatest works of our Lord Jesus were done there. You will remember that many mighty works, including the healing of Peter's wife's mother, the centurion's servant. Oh, how I love the centurion and his reliance upon the Lord Jesus. Not forgetting that he was an officer of the occupying Roman army. What a breath of the grace of God we have blowing through the streets and dwelling places of Capernaum. Little Capernaum. An appalled man carried by four faithful friends taking infinite trouble [00:20:02] from their point of view to place their needy friend at the feet of Jesus. I don't know why I'm laboring this, save that it's lovely to savor the wonder of the grace that was found alive and breathing in Capernaum. And yet the day came when the verse we read at the beginning, the Lord had sadly to say, and thou, Capernaum which art exalted to heaven shall be thrust down to hell.

But why?

How is it? Is it that the grace of God and salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ is ultimately a failure? [00:21:01] Why was it?

Well, he gives the reason because they repented not with all that evidence and all that love and grace in their midst with the living operative Savior speaking and acting and backing his every word by actions in their very midst. Yet as a city they repented not. They were worse than Nineveh, they were more blessed than Nineveh because, but they were worse than Nineveh in that they repented not and yet my point to be quickly made at this moment is that they too were destroyed so thoroughly that the archaeologists [00:22:02] disagree among themselves to this very day as to the exact site of Capernaum. Other cities are there they can last but Capernaum as the Lord said cast down to hell. I hope I can just get you to join me in getting this flash of wonderful light that the grace of God shown out in the blessed love of our Lord Jesus Christ did result in every individual some of them quite remarkably or let's say all of them miraculously catching [00:23:02] other sight of his face and the sound of his words were granted personal faith by God and they were saved and they were blessed and they were helped while the rest who had the same privilege sank and went down. But now let us turn to another great organization far greater than Nineveh far more blessed than Capernaum Christendom Christendom Somebody says as I used to say what is Christendom? What do brethren mean when they throw the word Christendom across the floor of the Bible reading as though everybody knew what it meant? [00:24:01] Maybe some person some young person here still feels like that about some of these words It's not mentioned in the Bible the word isn't found in the Bible Christendom but it's a place alright and it's vast it includes every country and every place in the world which is officially Christian officially Christian parts of the world that have had the inestimable privilege of hearing the gospel clearly sounded the gospel concerning our Lord Jesus Christ which does not say if you're good and if you try and if you walk a decent life in the light of the teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ you'll be a Christian and you might get into heaven the gospel says [00:25:02]

that whosoever believeth in him shall not perish it's a matter of belief to the point of faith which brings you into operation not theoretical belief not just acceptance of a great name or a set of teachings but belief as a worthless guilty sinner in the saving power of the name of Jesus one by himself when he went to Calvary's cross and paid the price for the guiltiest of men to be saved and brought into God's own home I just spend a moment on that because I believe that in every [00:26:01] Christian audience there is usually someone who doesn't really thoroughly know the Savior as his or her own Savior well once more God speaks prophetically to this highly privileged community and the second and third chapters of Revelation are the prophetic description of Christendom right from its beginning to now and until it will shortly close it's no news to you my dear brother I suppose that God has in his wisdom shown us in this our day that the words written [00:27:01] at the beginning have a significance which perhaps even John himself did not appreciate there have been seven phases of Christianity and there they are outlined in these letters written by John to seven assemblies of Christians which then existed we know that John wrote don't we at the end of a long life we know that there have been time for Christian teaching to take root for many people to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ for them to gather themselves or be gathered around the name of the Lord Jesus in many places and therefore John at the end of his life, his long life was able to write [00:28:02] to people among whom the word of God had been spreading and working but alas it wasn't the only thing that spread and worked among these assemblies of that early day I think it's very marvellous that God should have placed in the last book of his word a sort of I nearly said thumbnail description it's hardly that but a very brief description of what he thinks about that which set off so wonderfully under the name of our Lord Jesus Christ let me just emphasise that again this thing that I'm talking about Christendom officially believes in the Lord Jesus Christ England is still officially a Christian country [00:29:03] I don't need to labour that point long do I and we haven't time to look at all that is said to those seven companies and some of you are very familiar with it I know but the reaction of the Spirit of God as he instructed John to write speaking for the Master of the Church of England speaking for the Master the Lord Jesus Christ himself his reaction to some of the things found in the assemblies ranges from if you don't repent to Ephesus I will take away your [00:30:01] light of witness I will deny you the right to be a testimony to the world around it ranges from that to the terribly nauseating words I will spew thee out of my mouth to think that the blessed Saviour should ever have to say words like that to an organisation of men and women whose profession was that they belonged to him can give us extra thought at this time I'm sure if it demonstrates well it does demonstrate something I was going to say if it demonstrates anything it is that man men and women [00:31:01] are not to be trusted with the finest thing that God can give just not to be trusted don't let me stand here and talk like that let me say I am not to be trusted with the finest thing that God can that God can think of to give a human creature that is salvation not only forgiveness of my many sins but he offers me does he not a place and gives me in his family and then says you're still on earth and remember the Lord the words of the Lord Jesus when he said where two or three are gathered together there am I in the midst of them what a holy wonderful privilege and then to [00:32:01] have to say that what has resulted from the incursion of the enemy into an organization like that is so unacceptable that the Lord Jesus as we read prophetically here standing outside the door had to say behold I stand at the door and if any man inside that that organization hears my voice and opens the door I will come in wonderful grace that he should make himself so available in such a condition at this time but God is to be trusted man is not to be trusted but thank God we can say that God never ever changes and [00:33:03] he has seven major complaints God who is absolutely holy from the beginning and will be through to the end lodges seven complaints against our Christendom we haven't time to examine them all but he starts with saying loss of first love that's what I have against you loss of first love then he says the doctrine of Balaam has been introduced idols and all the filth that goes with idolatry what? into that which [00:34:01] claims to be the church of God then he says to Sardis you may claim to be alive you may have a name that

you live but you're dead and then he says to Laodicea you're not to me even dead you're neither warm nor hot you're revolting to me the spirit of the age has been summed up in this connection even by the world as couldn't care less does it matter? lukewarm lukewarmness [00:35:01] marks Laodicea and also the very last phase of church history beyond I believe the day when the Lord Jesus comes for his own this spirit will be found I believe a claim to be rich on really poor these are the things which God has against those who are in Christendom but it's a joyous thing to know that just as there are seven phases dealt with in this catalogue of church history by prophetic means that there are also seven overcomers victors seven ages when with every step of [00:36:01] declension with every every temptation to turn away from the Lord there's also those who overcome who not only resist the tendency but win the battle and let me come to examine this one phase Philadelphia by grace some of us have been privileged are being privileged to live during that period described here as Philadelphia Philadelphia Philadelphia means love of the brethren and there's nothing wrong said about Philadelphia it strikes me too as remarkable [00:37:01] that the last phase of church history down the ages and we're in it now is marked by two contrasting attitudes Philadelphia love of the brethren and lukewarmness Laodicea the two things can be seen their tendencies side by side a dear old brother who is now with the Lord said one day you can be a Philadelphian brother in a Laodicean place you can be a Laodicean person in a Laodicean place and it's the warning behind all this that is heavily on my heart this afternoon heavily on my heart because this great Christendom [00:38:02] more privileged than either and far bigger and more privileged than either Nineveh or Capernaum with the Holy Spirit always present in the world as it exists is so corrupt and rotten at the end that it falls in for the judgment of God so the Christianity we talk about and the Christianity of the religionist is a dreadful thing it is only Christ in the midst of his own people firing our hearts and enabling us to overcome which has the slightest breath of hope in it but it has that [00:39:01] and more because I noticed that whilst God lays seven major complaints against those that call upon the name of Christ and there are seven types of overcomer mentioned here there's no less than sixteen different rewards for overcoming why somebody should have a reward for overcoming when they can only overcome in the power of our Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit dwelling within I don't know except what I do know is that it is just like our giving loving God with his inflexible [00:40:01] holiness to turn upon us his eternal love and his grace and reward us for punishing but let's just have a look at some of the rewards and there are four of them named in Philadelphia I used to say to myself youngster and immature as I've been for so many years if there's nothing wrong with Philadelphia no fault that God can pin on them weakness just as poor Smyrna had no fault they hadn't time they were crushed down by persecution but there was an overcomer there but in Philadelphia why should an overcomer be named in connection with Philadelphia [00:41:01] what is there to overcome I believe in this sense that we must look back and our overcoming has to be against all the faults we find named here which are the basis of God's holy complaint how do I overcome our the blessed savior said in the world he shall have persecution but be of good cheer I have overcome the world ah you say yes but then look who he was yes but look where he went he was a man and he suffered infinitely at Calvary's cross but as regards the world with all the temptations [00:42:01] of the devil added to it he could say of course he could I have overcome what have you overcome lord in this connection I have overcome the world do you know every glorious achievement of our lord Jesus Christ has been passed in the love of God and in the power of the Holy Spirit onto us as a possibility as a possibility I would think I'm addressing a company of overcomers this afternoon but maybe the message will get through that the danger is there the danger of having a name to live for example ah you say but that was said of Sardis yes [00:43:01] but the danger of having a name to live for while really being dead one doesn't have to look as far as the representatives of Sardis to find that the spirit of it can be wickedly lurking in my heart a name to live a theoretical enjoyment of truth while dead in practice and performance it's possible it is possible if it were not possible it wouldn't be here but it is alas but the

rewards for connected with Philadelphia oh I love this he says you may have been weak in this world only a [00:44:01] little strength a pillar in the temple of my God a strength of the very temple of God figurative of course cause there's no temple in the new Jerusalem by God says those who have overcome in this period I will make not only a tower of strength but also a pillar that Solomon erected at the temple of his day Jashen and Boaz strength and glory continuance and he said I'll make you a pillar in the temple of my God my God says Jesus and you shall go no more out it's a permanent position [00:45:01] of strength and I believe decoration I don't like the word but I believe it's something the Lord Jesus will make the overcomer in Philadelphia is to add glory to that future day of his glory next I will write upon him the overcomer around where I live some years ago I think he's gone probably the way of many wealthy land owners now but as you approached his property his initials were on every gate HB Harrison Broadway everybody knew it but as you saw the animals running about the field they carried beautiful things imprinted [00:46:01] upon his place and his stock the Lord Jesus said I will write the name of my God upon him ownership by God unseen to be in the name of the city of my God I will write upon him just let us think of it to be a free man of the city of London they say but here the Lord writes the name of the city of my God he says upon the overcomer and lastly my new name what the Lord Jesus writing his new name upon me so he says he delights in rewarding always has [00:47:01] not a sheer brutal physical or even spiritual and tortuous effort but for faithfulness for overcoming in the power of the Holy Spirit and of his name the evils presented here in this great place called Christendom in which we live we can do it he can do it in us he's wanting to do it let us be careful that we're not trapped or sidetracked into these other attitudes and yes attitudes and actions which mark the place that officially owns the name of the Lord Jesus you've got to be above and beyond [00:48:01] it well that's it a remembrance that the holiness of God will pull down and destroy everything that turns aside from him but that in the midst of everything Denver Capernaum Christendom there are those that he touches with the truth he lets them into the secret of his thinking and he empowers them to be in each place in each case for you and for me overcomers for the